

Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary

Management Plan Review

The Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary (sanctuary) protects humpback whales and their habitat in the main Hawaiian Islands. The sanctuary works to achieve this goal through scientific research, education, public outreach, and by facilitating observance of federal and state laws that prohibit disturbing these endangered marine mammals. Congress established the sanctuary in 1992 via the Hawaiian Islands National Marine Sanctuary Act (HINMSA). Full designation of the sanctuary was completed with the finalization of the sanctuary's first management plan in June 1997. The plan was later reviewed in 2002 through a process required by law that included public review and comment.

What is a Management Plan and why is it being reviewed?

A sanctuary management plan is a site-specific planning and management document that describes the objectives, policies, and activities for a sanctuary. Management plans generally outline regulatory goals, describe boundaries, identify staffing and budget needs, set priorities and performance measures for resource protection, research, and education programs.

The Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS) is required by law to periodically review sanctuary management plans to ensure that sanctuary sites continue to best conserve, protect, and enhance their nationally significant living and cultural resources. Recent scientific discoveries, advancements in managing marine resources, and new resource management issues may not always be addressed in existing plans.

How did the process begin?

This process began with an evaluation of the existing sanctuary management plan, regulations, and threats to sanctuary resources; in this case the humpback whale and its habitat. As identified in the HINMSA, the sanctuary and the State of Hawai'i also intend to consider other marine resources for possible inclusion in the sanctuary, an effort supported by the Governor. The public is encouraged to take advantage of every opportunity to participate and comment during the management plan review process.

Why is the sanctuary considering adding new marine resources?

The identification of marine resources in addition to humpback whales and their habitat was stipulated by Congress in the 1992 HINMSA. During the 2002 management plan review and revision process numerous public comments were received requesting the sanctuary to increase its scope to include the conservation and management of other resources and species. Governor Linda Lingle has also expressed her support for considering other marine mammals and sea turtles for possible inclusion to the sanctuary. In response to the Congressional mandate, the Governor's support and overwhelming public opinion, the sanctuary is implementing a process to identify new marine resources appropriate for protection by the sanctuary.

How will the public be involved?

Active and informed public participation is a key element of sanctuary management. The ONMS recognizes the public as a key resource management partner and values their input in helping to shape and manage marine sanctuaries. There will be numerous opportunities to make direct comments to the ONMS and the sanctuary on the management of the sanctuary's natural and cultural resources. These opportunities will begin with public scoping meetings and continue through the development of the draft and final management plans. The ONMS will provide ample notice of each meeting through local media and the website.

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What are scoping meetings?

Scoping meetings provide a forum for resource users, interest groups, government agencies, and other members of the public to provide comments on what they believe should be addressed in an updated management plan. They are not decision making meetings. The comments received will help define program needs to address during the sanctuary management plan review process.

Where and when will the meetings be held?

Scoping meetings will be held on O'ahu, Maui, Hawai'i, Kaua'i, Lana'i, and Moloka'i. The schedule will be announced online at hawaiihumpbackwhale.noaa.gov.

What can I expect at the scoping meetings?

At the beginning of each meeting, sanctuary staff will provide information on the background and programs of the sanctuary. Following a brief introduction, the group will break up into roundtable discussion groups. A group leader at each table will help facilitate the discussion and ensure everyone has the opportunity to comment. All comments will be recorded.

What happens following the scoping meetings?

Action Plans: After the scoping meetings, sanctuary staff will review all comments and work with its Sanctuary Advisory Council and the public to prioritize issues for the management plan review. Additional workshops will be conducted to develop action plans that address priority issues. These action plans will form the foundation of the draft management plan.

Draft Management Plan: The draft management plan will contain the newly developed action plans that address resource protection and the general management of the sanctuary. Additionally, it may also propose regulatory changes. The sanctuary will take written comments and host a series of public meetings following the completion of the draft management plan.

Environmental Assessment: If necessary a supporting environmental document such as an Environmental Impact Statement will be prepared to support and explain any proposed changes.

Final Management Plan: Following the review of public comments, the ONMS will make any necessary changes prior to issuing the final management plan. The final management plan, regulations, and any recommendations concerning the addition of other marine resources in the sanctuary will be submitted to the Governor of Hawai'i for their approval in state waters.

How can you provide input?

The ONMS and the sanctuary encourage interested members of the public to participate and provide comments throughout the Management Plan Review process. The first opportunity will be at the public scoping meetings. Those unable to attend in person can mail, e-mail or fax written comments directly to the Management Plan Review Coordinator:

Management Plan Review Coordinator
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Where can I get more information?

Find out more online at hawaiihumpbackwhale.noaa.gov or contact the sanctuary office at 1.888.55.WHALE. Also, visit us online to subscribe to the management plan review listserver to receive e-updates about the process.